

Active Reading Skills

Active reading is meaningful interaction with the text. It does not mean just reading word for word.

Ways to engage meaningfully with the text include:

- Ask pre-reading questions such as: What is the topic? What do you already know? Why has the instructor assigned this reading at this point in the semester? Does this relate or build upon previous course readings?
- Identify and define any unfamiliar terms.
- Bracket the main idea or thesis of the text. The introduction or opening paragraphs are a road map for what you will be reading.
- Look for clues. Start by skimming the titles/headings of the text. They tip you off to the main points that the author wants you to learn. If something is boldface or italicized, it is probably important.
 - Look for key words like “causes,” “results,” “effects,” etc.
 - Signal words such as “versus” or “pros and cons” indicate the author is planning to represent many sides of an argument.
- Highlight less and comment more! Highlight to organize and retrieve, and comment in the margins to engage with the text. Jot down the key words, agree/disagree with claims, note page numbers of other course materials that either support or refute the claim, etc. Above all, enter into a dialogue with the author.
- Ask questions in the margins. If you can answer them do so in a separate paper or document. If you do not know the answer, you already have questions to ask during class, in office hours, or with your peers. Try changing all the titles, subtitles, sections and paragraph headings into questions so you can focus your reading to find the answers.
- Take notes on a separate paper or document as you read.